DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 427 556 FL 801 284

AUTHOR Moss, Donna; Van Duzer, Carol
TITLE Project-Based Learning for Adult English Language Learners. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education, Washington, DC.; Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education, Washington, DC.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO EDO-LE-98-07
PUB DATE 1998-12-00
NOTE 4p.
CONTRACT RR93002010
AVAILABLE FROM NCLE, 4646 40th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20016; Tel: 202-362-0700, ext. 200; e-mail: ncle@cal.org; Web site: http://www.cal.org/ncle
PUB TYPE ERIC Publications (071) -- ERIC Digests in Full Text (073)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; Adults; *English (Second Language); Language Proficiency; Second Language Instruction; Second Language Learning; *Student Projects; *Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

Project-based learning is an instructional approach that contextualizes learning by presenting learners with problems to solve or products to develop. For example, learners may research adult education resources in their community and create a handbook to share with other language learners in their program, or they might interview local employers and then create a bar graph mapping the employers responses to questions about qualities they look for in employees. This digest provides a rationale for using project-based learning with adult English language learners, describes the process, and gives examples of how the staff of an adult English-as-a-Second-Language program have used project-based learning with adult learners at varying levels of English proficiency. (Author/JL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ERIC Digest

December 1998
EDO-LE-98-07

National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education

Project-Based Learning for Adult English Language Learners

by Donna Moss, Arlington (VA) Education and Employment Program (REEP)
Carol Van Duzer, National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education

ED 427 556

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

- This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
- Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

FL801284

ERIC Digest
National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education

December 1998
EDO-LE-98-07

Project-Based Learning for Adult English Language Learners

by Donna Moss, Arlington (VA) Education and Employment Program (REEP)
Carol Van Duzer, National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education

Project-based learning is an instructional approach that contextualizes learning by presenting learners with problems to solve or products to develop. For example, learners may research adult education resources in their community and create a handbook to share with other language learners in their program, or they might interview local employers and then create a bar graph mapping the employers, responses to questions about qualities they look for in employees. This digest provides a rationale for using project-based learning with adult English language learners, describes the process, and gives examples of how the staff of an adult English as a second language (ESL) program have used project-based learning with their adult learners at varying levels of English proficiency.

Rationale for Project-based Learning

Project-based learning functions as a bridge between using English in class and using English in real life situations outside of class (Fried-Booth, 1997). It does this by placing learners in situations that require authentic use of language in order to communicate (e.g., being part of a team or interviewing others). When learners work in pairs or in teams, they find they need skills to plan, organize, negotiate, make their points, and arrive at a consensus about issues such as what tasks to perform, who will be responsible for each task, and how information will be researched and presented. These skills have been identified by learners as important for living successful lives (Stein, 1995) and by employers as necessary in a high-performance workplace (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991). Because of the collaborative nature of project work, development of these skills occurs even among learners at low levels of language proficiency. Within the group work integral to projects, individuals' strengths and preferred ways of learning (e.g., by reading, writing, listening, or speaking) strengthen the work of the team as a whole (Lawrence, 1997).

The Process of Project-based Work

The basic phases found in most projects include selecting a topic, making plans, researching, developing products, and sharing results with others (Wrigley, 1998). However, because project-based learning hinges on group effort, establishing a trusting, cooperative relationship before embarking on a full-fledged project is also necessary. Activities that engage learners in communication tasks and in peer- and self-evaluation help create the proper classroom environment. Information gap activities (where the assignment can only be completed through sharing of the different information given each learner), learner-to-learner interviews, role plays, simulations, field trips, contact assignments outside of class, and process writing with peers prepare learners for project work.

Selecting Topics

A project should reflect the interests and concerns of the learners. Teachers can begin determining project topics at the start of an instructional cycle by conducting a class needs assessment to identify topic areas and skills to be developed. As the teacher and learners talk about projects and get to know each other, new topics and issues may come to light that are appropriate for project learning. A project may focus on the objectives of one instructional unit, such as a unit on health, or it may span several units. It may take place during a unit or be a culminating final event. Whatever the project, learners need to be in on the decision making from the beginning (Moss, 1998).

Making Plans and Doing Research

Once a topic is selected, learners work together to plan the project, conduct research, and develop their products. Learners with low language proficiency or little experience working as part of a team may require structure and support throughout the project. Pre-project activities that introduce problem-solving strategies, language for negotiation, and methods for developing plans are useful. Learners may also need practice in specific language skills to complete project tasks. For example, learners using interviews as an information gathering technique may need instruction and practice in constructing and asking questions as well as in taking notes.

Sharing Results with Others

Project results can be shared in a number of ways. Oral presentations can accompany written products within the classroom or in other classes within the program. Project products can also be disseminated in the larger community, as in the case of English language learners from an adult program in New York City, whose project culminated in the creation and management of a café and catering business. (Lawrence, 1997; Wrigley, 1998).

Assessing Project-based Work

Project-based work lends itself well to evaluation of both employability skills and language skills. Introducing learners to self-evaluation and peer evaluation prior to embarking on a large project is advisable. Learners can evaluate themselves and each other through role plays, learner-to-learner interviews, and writing activities. They can become familiar with completing evaluation forms related to general class activities, and they can write about their learning in weekly journals where they reflect on what they learned, how they felt about their learning, and what they need to continue to work on in the future.

Assessment can be done by teachers, peers, or oneself. Teachers can observe the skills and knowledge that learners use and the ways they use language during the project. Learners can reflect on their own work and that of their peers, how well the team works, how they feel about their work and progress, and what skills and knowledge they are gaining. Reflecting on work, checking progress, and identifying areas of strength and weakness are part of the learning process. Assessment can also be done through small-group discussion with guided questions. What did your classmates do very well in the project? Was there anything that needed improvement? What? Why? The ability to identify or label the learning that is taking place builds life-long

EL 801284

CAL Center for Applied Linguistics • 4646 40th Street, NW • Washington, DC 20016 • (202)362-0700

learning skills. Questionnaires, checklists, or essays can help learners do this by inviting them to reflect critically on the skills and knowledge they are gaining. In a New York City initiative using project-based learning with adult English language learners called Expanding Capacity in ESOL programs (EXCAP), assessment occurred daily in dialogue journals, checklists, and portfolios (Lawrence, 1997).

Examples from the Field

At the Arlington Education and Employment Program (REEP) in Virginia, a team of teachers designed and implemented several projects for their students, ranging from literacy level to advanced pre-TOEFL. They developed a framework for projects including learning strategies and affective behaviors that have a positive effect on progress and language learning. These behaviors include risk taking; using technological, human, and material resources; and organizing materials (Van Duzer, 1994). The project followed the four purposes for literacy identified by the Equipped For the Future initiative of the National Institute for Literacy–to access information, voice ideas and opinions, act independently, and continue learning throughout life (Stein, 1995). The two projects described below, developed by REEP staff, illustrate the range and complexity of project work.

In one project, parents in a family literacy program and their elementary school children created a coloring and activity book of community information for families living in their neighborhood in Arlington, Virginia. All of the parents and children took part in brainstorming sessions. They selected information, text, and graphics topics for each page of the book and contributed to the creation of the pages. Parents in the intermediate level class managed the production of the book and researched the topics selected (e.g., immunization, school). The adult literacy class located addresses and phone numbers of local agencies that provide needed services and illustrated a shopping guide of local stores they liked. They also designed a page of emergency telephone numbers. The children worked on drawings and activity pages for children. When the book was completed, the families presented it to the principal of the local elementary school. Some of the families participated in a "Meet the Authors" day at the local library.

Parents and children alike kept their work in portfolios and completed assessment questionnaires. They shared their evaluations with each other and explained why they evaluated themselves the way they did. The teachers evaluated the parents on language skills, team participation, and successful completion of tasks.

In another project, learners in an advanced intensive ESL class worked in pairs to present a thirty-minute lesson to other classes in the program. They worked collaboratively to determine the needs of their audience, interview teachers, choose topics, conduct research, prepare lessons, practice, offer evaluations to other teams during the rehearsal phase, present their lessons, and evaluate the effort. Topics ranged from ways to get rid of cockroaches to how the local government works.

Before the lesson planning began, learners identified lesson objectives and evaluation criteria. They shared ideas on what makes a presentation successful, considering both language and presentation skills. The evaluation criteria used for feedback on rehearsals as well as for final evaluations include the following:

- Introduces self and the topic clearly, respectfully, and completely.
- Includes interactive activities in the lesson.
- Speaks in a way that is easy to understand.
- Is responsive to the audience.
- Shows evidence of preparation and practice.
- Shows knowledge of the topic.

In addition, the teachers and learners in the classes receiving the presentations wrote evaluations of the lessons. The presenters also wrote an evaluation essay reflecting on their own work and the value of the project itself.

Conclusion

Project-based work involves careful planning and flexibility on the part of the teacher. Because of the dynamic nature of this type of learning, not all problems can be anticipated. Moreover, sometimes a project will move forward in a different direction than originally planned. Project work is organic and unique to each class. This makes it exciting, challenging, and meaningful to adult learners.

References

Dewar, T. (1996). *Adult learning online* [WWW document] URL: http://www.cybercorp.net/~tammy/lo/oned2.html.

Fried-Booth, D. L. (1997). *Project work.* (8th Ed.) Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lawrence, A. (1997.) Expanding capacity in ESOL programs (EXCAP): Using projects to enhance instruction. *Literacy Harvest: The Journal of the Literacy Assistance Center, 6 (1),* 1-9.

Moss, D. (1998). *Project-based learning and assessment: A resource manual for teachers.* Arlington, VA: The Arlington Education and Employment Program (REEP).

Stein, S. (1995). *Equipped for the future: A customer-driven vision for adult literacy and lifelong learning.* Washington, DC: National Institute for Literacy. (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. ED 384 792)

U.S. Department of Labor, The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills. (1991). *What work requires of schools: A SCANS report for America 2000.* Washington, DC: Author. (EDRS No. ED 332 054).

Van Duzer, C. (1994). *Report to the adult education network.* Arlington, VA: Arlington Education and Employment Program (REEP).

Wrigley, H.S. (1998). Knowledge in action: The promise of project-based learning. *Focus on Basics, 2* (D), 13-18.

Principles of Project-Based Learning

Project-based learning is characterized by the following principles:

- Builds on previous work;
- Integrates speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills;
- Incorporates collaborative team work, problem solving, negotiating and other interpersonal skills;
- Requires learners to engage in independent work;
- Challenges learners to use English in new and different contexts outside the class;
- Involves learners in choosing the focus of the project and in the planning process;
- Engages learners in acquiring new information that is important to them;
- Leads to clear outcomes; and
- Incorporates self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and teacher evaluation.

ERIC/NCLE Digests are available free of charge from the National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education, 4646 40th Street NW, Washington, DC 20016; (202) 362-0700, ext. 200; e-mail: ncle@cal.org. ERIC/NCLE Digests can be downloaded from the World Wide Web at http://www.cal.org/ncle.

Citations with an ED number may be obtained from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS) at 1-800-443-3742.

The National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education (NCLE) is operated by the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) with funding from the U.S. Department of Education (ED), Office of Educational Research and Improvement, under contract no. RR93002010. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of ED.